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FARM AND HOME DEVELOPMENT

The Ladners' Bid for a Brighter Future

The keen interest of their son in 4-H Club work was one of the main things that inspired the Ladners to take a chance. They took the chance, and they won.

In 1944 Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Ladner and their 13 -year-old son, Virgil, owned and operated a small farm in Pearl River County, Mississippi. Their farm consisted of 2 acres of pecan trees, 5 acres of unimproved pastures, and 15 acres of cropland. The family operated a 20-cow dairy by grazing the cows in the woods almost 100 percent of the time. The 5 acres of pastures were used to graze work animals and a Jersey bull. Most of the winter feed for the cows had to be purchased, and most of the winter milk checks went to pay feed bills. This system of farming wasn't earning much net income for family living.

The farm home had no modern conveniences such as running water or electricity.

The Ladners wanted a better living, and they wanted to provide some future anchorage for Virgil, their youngest child, who had been an enthusiastic 4-H Club member since 1941. They studied several possibilities, and discussed them with a number of people including the county extension agents. They concluded that their opportunities were very limited unless they could get more and better land.

A tract of about 400 acres of cutover land approximately 8 miles away was for sale. Most of it could be cleared for pastures and crops, and it could be bought on terms. The Ladners felt they would be taking

a chance to buy it. A collapse of prices or a heavy medical expense, for example, could wipe out their equity. On the other hand, it offered prospect of a larger and more efficient farm business, a much better living, and opportunity in farming for Virgil. They decided to make the down payment on the 400 acres.

For 2 years Mr. Ladner and his son would go over to the new tract and camp for 6 days each week, clearing land, preparing it, and gradually putting it into a cropping system. At the end of 2 years, sufficient land had been cleared and put into crops and pastures to enable them to construct a new home there.

The first pasture on the new farm - a 16-acre plot - was established as a 4-H Club project. It was seeded according to recommendations at that time in Dallis grass, common lespedeza, and white Dutch clover, and fertilized according to recommendations of the Extension Service. (Later, it was to serve as a pilot plot in the establishment of pastures for approximately 100 head of dairy cattle.)

Five registered, bred dairy heifers were purchased as another of Virgil's 4-H Club projects in 1945. Virgil was one of five 4-H Club boys whose loans to buy livestock were recommended by the Pearl River County Livestock Association. Credit with the Hattiesburg Production Credit Association, established in this way, was used extensively in the further development of the farm business.

A farm plan covering the entire 400 acres was made out. As is true of all good long-range plans this plan was revised somewhat as it was put into effect over a period of years.

The Ladner farm was in the heart of the tung section. Since there was plenty of suitable land, and tung nuts promised to be a profitable

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crop, plantings of tung trees were included in the farm plan along with expansion of the dairy enterprise.

In carrying out their plan, the Ladners relied heavily on the county extension agents for further counsel and information in connection with such steps as taking soil samples, terracing, laying out fence lines, culling cows and selecting heifers for replacements, harvesting silage and seeds, insect control, and forest management.

A 4-H award made to Virgil in 1949 indicates that the Ladners' plans were being worked out. It is a placque awarded for all-round efficient dairy production by the National Dairy Products Corporation. It reads: "Efficient Production Award for Superior Achievement - 4-H Club Work - State of Mississippi - 1949."

An adjoining 80-acre tract was purchased in 1952. Today there are approximately 30 acres of bearing tung trees, 30 acres that have not yet reached bearing age, and 40 more acres set out in 1954. There are approximately 50 acres of improved pastures, part in Dallis grass and white Dutch clover, and part in Dallis grass and common lespedeza. Approximately 100 acres are devoted to temporary grazing crops, both summer and winter. During the winter months these 100 acres are in fall-sown Camellia oats for grazing. Crimson clover is sown with most of it. In summer these 100 acres are in Alyce clover or Pearl millet, or both. About 50 acres are devoted to corn, hay, and sorghum silage for the livestock.

There are now approximately 60 dairy cows, half registered Jerseys and half high grades, and about 40 calves and heifers. Home-grown pastures, hay and silage are the basis of the ration. Milk sales amount to about \$16,000 annually.

The 6-year-old tung orchard is probably one of the highest-yielding orchards in this area. It produced approximately 2-1/2 tons of nuts in its fifth year.

The land, all of which is rolling, has been well terraced. Pastures, fences, and roads have been laid out to provide for soil conservation and convenience. The land that is not in pastures, crops, or orchards is devoted to the production of long-leaf yellow pine which was established by reseeding and is protected by fire lanes.

The home has been remodeled according to the Home Demonstration Agent's suggestions for maximum convenience. It consists of four bedrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen, front and side porches, and a bathroom. The kitchen is equipped with an electric stove, refrigerator, and sink. There is butane gas heat, a television set, and a 20-cubic-foot deep freeze. The Ladners do a good job of producing food for home use.

There are two tractors with complete equipment for cultivation and hay making, and a farm truck. A well-designed service area has access to implement sheds, a loafing barn for the cows, poultry houses, and a feed barn. A trench silo is maintained for storage of 160 tons of silage. Silage is harvested with a field chopper and packed with a tractor. The dairy barn has hot and cold running water and modern milking machines.

The family today consists of Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Ladner and now Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Ladner and their young daughter. Virgil and his father have been working under a partnership agreement for several years.

The Ladner farm has served on several occasions as a demonstration of a balanced farm and home business. On such occasions the Ladners have always delighted in showing farm people of south Mississippi who

visited their farm the results of an effective farm and home plan actually carried out.

With sales of milk and tung nuts plus sales of surplus seeds, feeds and animals, the farm has a gross income of approximately \$20,000 per year. Both the gross and the net income are several times greater than they were before the Ladners decided to buy more and better land and to plan and work toward a brighter future.

Mr. L. L. Ladner says that without visits by the county extension agents, he would probably still be following a mule and grazing cows in the woods. The county extension agents say they would feel compelled to investigate should some member of the Ladner family fail to visit or call the office at least twice per month. And when improved methods are available, the Ladner farm will be one of the first to adopt them.

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